

# Gift from parent to child

## Schools welcome 2nd generation students

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SPECIAL TO CATHOLIC HERALD FAMILY

When Danny and Katie Ruppinn stepped into St. Matthias Catholic School this fall, they continued a Catholic school tradition begun by their grandparents.

The children of Kris and Michael Ruppinn are walking through the same halls, learning in the same classrooms, playing on the same playground and receiving a Catholic education in the same school their mother attended.

As a 1980 graduate of St. Matthias, Kris knew Catholic education was important to her parents. After all, both had graduated from Catholic grade and high schools, and recognized their faith-based education was a positive influence for them.

When Kris was still dating Michael, she remembers telling him it was mandatory that her children have a Catholic education, similar to the one she experienced at St. Matthias.

"If that was a deal breaker for him, so be it," she said, laughing. "Luckily, it wasn't."

### Families share positive feedback

Before sending the children to St. Matthias, Kris wanted to make sure it was still the same faith-based school she remembered attending. She interviewed parents with children attending the school to get feedback.

"They all had very good experiences at St. Matthias," she explained. "There were people that I worked with who sent their children to St. Matthias. They were very educated individuals, including a physician and an ICU RN. I knew they had high expecta-



**Left:** Kris (Hoepfl) Ruppinn, back left, and Jane (Hapke) Barwick, back right, both St. Matthias School, Milwaukee class of 1980 have sent their children to the same school. Pictured between the women is Noel Barwick, a sixth grader. Front row, left to right, are Katie Ruppinn, KS, Danny Ruppinn and Jenna Barwick, both third graders. (Submitted photo courtesy Kris Ruppinn)



**Right:** Kris (Hoepfl) Ruppinn, left, teacher, Mary Schultz, center, and Jane (Hapke) Barwick, right, are pictured at their eighth grade graduation from St. Matthias School, Milwaukee, in 1980. Both Ruppinn and Barwick have children currently enrolled at St. Matthias School. (Submitted photo courtesy Kris Ruppinn)

tations for the school and felt their children got a quality education not only in academics, but in their faith."

With 9-year-old Danny and 6-year old Katie having fall birthdays, Kris appreciated the full-day 4K option not available at other schools she examined, or when she began school in 1973.

"I attended the open house prior to enrollment and talked with the staff, teachers and principal," she said. "It was a very good experience and it felt like a family atmosphere from the start. It was a community and I felt welcome, and was as if I was coming full circle, providing a faith-based education that served me well in my life. I wanted to provide that for my children."

The Ruppins are not alone; several second-generation families have children attending St. Matthias.

"I am so impressed with the values that my family and other families place on Catholic education," said Kris. "For example, my father attended Catholic grade and high schools and my mother

did the same. My two sisters and I went and now, all eight of our children are attending Catholic schools, too. There are a lot of difficult things that happen in our world. A moment of watching the news can tell you that. I feel that having a faith to help you get through life is paramount. I hope that my children will learn and apply that faith to carry them through whatever obstacles and challenges life throws at them."

### Classmate also chooses alma mater

Like the Ruppins, Jane and Steven Barwick also wanted their children to experience a Catholic education at St. Matthias. Jane, a classmate of Kris, also graduated in 1980 and Steve received his religious education at the school. When it came time to send Noel, 12, and Jenna, 8 to school, there was no question where they would enroll.

"I loved school there; it was the best time I ever had," said Jane. "I had phenomenal teachers, got a great education and there was nothing for me but happy times. What prompted us to send the kids there was to repeat what we went through and to build moral values with a faith-based educa-

tion and the ability to make good decisions as they grow older."

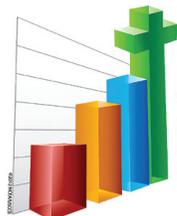
While there are no longer any religious sisters teaching at St. Matthias, as there were when Kris and Jane attended, the same Catholic values and close-knit friendships remain.

"My husband and I grew up near St. Matthias and we decided to stay in the area after we were married because of the school," explained Jane. "We knew we wanted to send them there and didn't want to move away from our brothers and sisters who still live in the area. I also have a niece, Alexa Petri, who is in seventh grade at the school, too."

### 40-year tradition continues

Jane remains involved at St. Matthias, helping with the art and environment committee and giving back whenever she can. Her mother, Mary Hapke, also volunteers with the school's early morning daycare, ensuring the children coming to school have eaten breakfast.

"Beginning with my mom, we have a 40-year tradition that we are carrying on. Everything is just perfect, and she gets to see my kids every day, too," said Jane. "It is a good habit to give back to the



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church and I want my children to develop those habits as well.”

## Phy Ed teacher now teaches computers

While much has changed, and most of the teachers have retired, Jane remembers Dalen Heinzen who had just started teaching at the school in 1979 as her physical education teacher.

“Now, he is the computer teacher,” said Jane, adding, “He is the only one left.”

Aside from the technological advances such as computers, smart boards and computer labs, Spanish, science lab, band, service projects, mentors, and lockers, the athletic department has expanded to include soccer, volleyball, basketball, softball and track.

“All of the sports are so ramped up,” said Jane. “There was no soccer when I was in school. I played basketball and volleyball and the whole program is much bigger now and includes tournaments, too.”

## Gift from parent to child

For Kevin Gehring, a 1975 St. Kilian School, Hartford graduate, who now sends four of his five children to the school, a Catholic education is the most important gift a parent can give their children.

“You know, it is expensive, especially with five kids, but really, if you can’t do anything else for them, this is the best investment you can make,” he said. “I wanted my kids to have the same opportunity for a Catholic education as I had. My wife, Mary, and I knew it would be difficult to teach them the faith solely through religious education and from our own experience. It is the best thing we can do for them so they can learn more about their faith and grow up to be better people.”

After high school, Kevin attended Mass at Holy Hill, and later, at St. Mary in Woodland, but as his children reached school age, they returned to St. Kilian because he

had such fond memories of his education at the school.

“It has been great and I am so pleased with the experience,” he said. “They are able to attend Mass at least once a week, not just on Sundays, and they have the opportunity to participate as well. This gives them a great learning experience from being able to help with the liturgy, such as bringing up gifts, reading the petitions, singing in the choir and lecturing.”

## Catholicism permeates education

While Kevin and Mary explored other options for their children, such as the public school system, both realized they wanted Catholicism to permeate their children’s education.

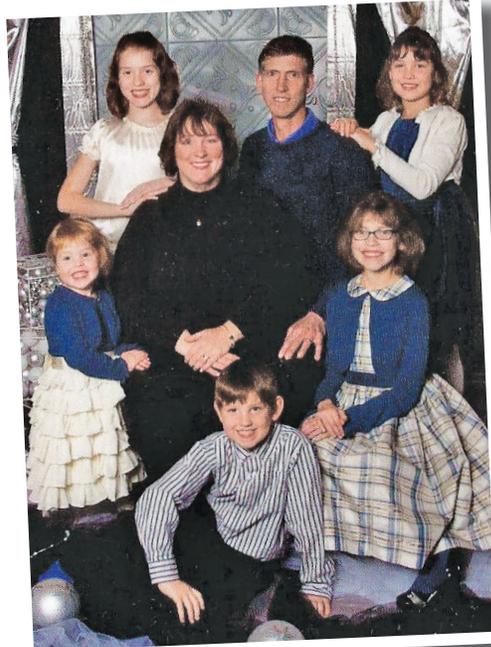
“They pray at lunch, at athletic events, in the classroom and for extra-curricular activities,” said Kevin. “You can’t do any of that at public schools. Here, their faith comes first; they don’t have to hide it at all.”

Similar to the Rupp and Barwick families, Kevin noticed quite a few changes since he attended in the ‘70s. For example, his children, Emily, seventh grade, Abigail, sixth grade, Madeline, fifth grade, and Gregory, third grade, take part in athletics, forensics, drama, ski club, work on computers and smart boards. Four-year-old Erica looks forward to attending kindergarten at St. Kilian next year.

“When I attended, the only thing we had was boys basketball,” he said. “Now there are sports and activities for everyone.”

Despite the absence of religious sisters and priests, the environment is much the same as when Kevin attended. The curriculum, discipline, Catholic moral teaching and respect for authority are still prevalent. One aspect has changed, and that is the increased level of parental involvement.

“I hear from a lot of people in the public school system that they basically drop their kids off and let the teachers and the kids duke it out,” he said. “Where at our Catholic school, the majority of parents



**The Gehring family** from Hartford is a second generation family at St. Kilian School, Hartford. Kevin Gehring is a 1975 St. Kilian grad. Pictured left with his wife, Mary, are the Gehring children, Emily, seventh grade, Abigail, sixth grade, Madeline, fifth grade, Gregory, third grade, and Erica who will attend kindergarten next year. (Submitted photo courtesy the Gehring family)



**Noel, 12, and Jenna Barwick, 8,** pose in their St. Matthias School uniforms earlier this school year. The girls’ mother, Jane Barwick, is a 1980 graduate of St. Matthias School, Milwaukee. (Submitted photo courtesy the Barwick family)

are very involved and it makes the teachers’ lives much easier.”

Each member of the teaching staff could make more money teaching in the public school system, but Kevin is grateful they have chosen to share their faith by teaching at St. Kilian.

“I think that they do this because it is important to share their

faith through teaching, and they know that the parents are going to support them,” he said. “That goes a long way with educating kids. Probably 80-90 percent of the parents are involved at some level, and if you can’t be involved or choose not to, they don’t hold it against you. They welcome all to attend St. Kilian.”

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